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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the struggle of librarians for academic recognition. It is based on a case study of a grassroots library association, the Library Association of the City Colleges of New York (LACCNY), striving for academic rank, as well as a review of the theories of associations. The history of LACCNY from 1939 to 1965 is summarized, noting that during this time that association vigilantly, consistently, and ineffectively sought teaching faculty salary and rank parity for its academic librarian members. Research and theories about the role of professional associations are examined in relationship to the activities of LACCNY. (Contains 14 references.) (MES)

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Collaboration between theory and evidence-based practice - two cultures: librarians and professors

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Abstract

This paper addresses the struggle of librarians for academic recognition. It is based on a case study of a grassroots library association striving for academic rank and theories of association.

Paper

Some years ago, I began an historical investigation of the record of activities, goals and accomplishments of an academic librarians' grass-roots association, the Library Association of the City Colleges of New York, called by its acronym LACCNY. Much held in admiration for reputedly winning faculty rank and benefits for its membership, I was eager to learn the way in which they arrived at such a glorious victory, nationally renowned. As the archival record showed LACCNY's seemingly endless and repeated failed attempts, over 26 years, to attain the association's primary goals of academic recognition and parity for its membership, my document searching turned into analytical probing. I knew that this evidence of record, in contrast with legend, replete with questionable practice by the association needed theoretical explanations. Why the failing tactics, why the unchanging efforts, indeed in light of its insignificance,

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what was its *raison d'être?* I was urged on by Michael Winter, in *The Culture and Control of Expertise*, who said,

> Sequential history, no matter how carefully documented, is not sufficient; chains of events must be placed in patterns of ideas, which come from several sources.[1]

This paper will present a highlight of what I discovered.

For twenty-six years, from 1939 to 1965, LACCNY, the Library Association of the City Colleges of New York, vigilantly, consistently and, alas, ineffectively, sought teaching faculty salary and rank parity for its academic librarian members. Although, in the end, the librarians were given what they wanted, it appeared that it was not because of LACCNY. Rather it was an accommodation to the needs and resources of the 1960's. In fact, had LACCNY paid more attention during the lost decades to social, political and economic external events and to values and trends that affected the fabric of higher education, and planned accordingly, the truly mistreated librarians might have reached their goal in less time.

Why study external events when what you want seems to lie within four walls in an office building in a city struggling with its own needs? Looking closer, though, we see, in those twenty-six years, a succession of national traumas and change: the United States entered the Second World War and came out of it to endure hard-hitting waves of inflation and recession; unionization and collective bargaining rose forcefully as a national movement while the Cold War raging at home and a hot war in Korea threw the American politic into a reactionary sweep of the nation for Communists; for twenty years, political fear enforced political complacency until newly growing disenfranchised groups discovered their power and used public demonstrations and civil disobedience to draw attention to their unmet needs.

LACCNY, it would seem, paid scant attention in the 40's, its early years, both to the city's dichotomous commitments that included stabilizing its huge post-war fiscal burdens while maintaining loyal adherence to free higher education. Neither is there evidence that, as an organization, it was particularly aware of the impact of the diverse and eccentric profiles of the students attending the colleges.[2]

Through the '50's, the smallness of the association's size along with librarians' traditionally recumbent politics and, above all, their reliance on reasoned appeals, would bring them defeat time and time again.

They did win some battles, the most important just before they formally became an association. In 1938, the founding members gained recognition of the college libraries as college departments rather than civil service operations. From that victory, and some eight years later, as a benefit of their departmental status, their members gained voting rights in campus-wide bodies. Their major and sometimes ally, the Legislative Conference of academic faculty, vigorously fighting for the professoriate, did help them raise a salary ceiling or two in 1943 and 1946. But those gains and those faculty privileges did not largely affect overall salary ranges, enable advancement, promote collegial acceptance or their recognition as peers of the faculty.

The record is as full of the many stated and written protests, briefs, reports

of LACCNY's leaders appearing at councils of more powerful bodies on and off campus and in government as much as it is empty of the benefits of such efforts. The librarians' varied academic backgrounds and qualifications left room for the city, state and campus administrations to pay them less and assign them longer working hours than the rest of the teaching faculty and justify placing and keeping them in categories least expensive to maintain. Their main goals, parity in title, work hours and work year as well as, and most importantly, salary were not gained through the careers of a generation or more of hard-working librarians.

Then it was 1965 and the goal was achieved. There came the Consultant, the angel of driven administrators seeking an elusive prize whose need must be convincingly expressed in the language of boards. Chancellor Albert Bowker of the City Colleges, which by 1965 had become an amalgamated University, was keenly aware of one thing--the need for more librarians. He was not particularly aware of their talents, their values, their education, or their collegial dilemma, but he knew that there were fewer than could meet the need of the expanding city campuses of the 1960's. To fill positions, in a buyers' market, he also knew he had to raise salaries. To do that he needed the approval of the Board of Higher Education. So Bowker hired Robert Downs, a known advocate of full faculty status and rank for librarians, also advantageously an outsider and an academic Dean. It was Downs' arguments and Bowker's use of it and the feared and growing movement for faculty unionization and collective bargaining that convinced the Board of Higher Education. Simply said, it would be easier to recruit librarians with increased pay and faculty rank. It was Chancellor Bowker who created the machinery that enabled the Board to adopt a resolution crafted by LACCNY seven years earlier, born out of a wistful dream twenty years before that.

To portray LACCNY as ineffective is not to dishonor or discredit its membership and its dedicated leaders, but to emphasize that **the impact of the larger social context is the predominant source of individual response**, not the virtue of associations or the correctness of their arguments and beliefs. It is also to point out that a group bent on changing response needs to engage politically, armed with a strong knowledge base of its culture and context, built on self-studies and mastery of administrative aims, important referral groups, current political and economic issues and government timetables; its representatives need to be skilled in the art of negotiation and of compromise. For as Sayre and Kaufman[3] describe it, political life is a contest involving competitors and prizes, core groups and satellites.

Repeatedly, LACCNY focused not on winning but on due process and reasoning. It had neither a strategic plan for achieving its goals or a political action plan for adept use of lobbying, advocacy and public relations. It did not seek to attract or involve other groups that could gain benefits from the larger effort. LACCNY members did not appear engaged in political life, not even as having a consciousness of itself in its social context. The city college libraries in those years, as William Myrick, Jr. shows, in the only other in-depth study of them, were unable even to coordinate their collection building and borrowing and could only barely cooperate with each other.[4]

"*Curiouser and curiouser*," as the saying goes, and as I researched the record of the association, the history of the colleges, the era and its events and people, I asked myself numerous times why did LACCNY's

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membership keep growing and its activities remain unchanged for so long despite its failures? Theory comes into play here.

There were the studies of occupational sociologists, Harmon Zeigler[5] and Robert Zussman[6]. Zeigler, observing the associations of teachers, found them **guardians of the status quo**, not agents for change; in the days before the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) became more active, teacher associations, similar to LACCNY, provided a place for its members to remain together in nonpolitical alienation.

Zussman's study of engineers likewise revealed an apolitical group which he attributed to their entrenchment in mid-level professionalism. Their goal was security in an increasingly insecure society. Dramatic or political involvement in the life beyond their communities and offices was not advisable.

The teachers and the engineers, like the librarians, appeared to construe activism as planning local activities, not change. These sociologists called them alienated claiming that alienation begets alliances of the alienated, not for assimilation, but for maintenance. The alienated have a hard time influencing the powerful as long as they remain in their alienation.

The most instructive theories were those of Albert Meister[7] , a Swiss sociologist, and student of associations. Meister theorized that in times or places where people would be anxious about rightfully belonging, their need for security is heightened. They seek the shelter of an association which then is primarily compelled by its members' emotional needs. Its importance to them, and their loyalty to it, depends more on the **perceived** security and support it offers than on the successful accomplishment of its stated goals.

Then, as now, an association forms out of the belief that it can make a difference in matters involving power and control. Yet change in society is complex and resisted by existing systems of values and operations. LACCNY's 26-year grievance was fostered in a spirit of increased personal expectations, out of the shadows of the Great Depression which, for some time, continued to bite at the heels of growing prosperity. In theory it should have fought like a union and planned like an organization to realize its goals of radical change. In practice, it was a small group, afraid of social activism, cautious, idealistic, and mired in the complacent values and rhetoric of its time including slow, cautious, persistent efforts to influence legislation through relentless but polite lobbying.

When louder social action and grander battles for civil rights became more acceptable, even LACCNY members talked among themselves of work actions; head librarians dared to relay to their college presidents dire administrative dilemmas with regard to overwork and understaffing. They were, however, consistent in not linking their cause with the causes of others, did not affiliate or derive any policies from organizations not sanctioned by city and campus administration. The approved group the librarians doggedly tagged was the Legislative Conference of the colleges' faculties because it was the one "approved" group. But, to that Congress, also slow and cautious, LACCNY's struggles were a continuous and seemingly insolvable dilemma that did not take precedence over its many larger concerns.

LACCNY might have served as a vehicle to promote union of librarians and teaching faculty. It did not. It did not publicize to the faculty its shared commitment to scholarship, knowledge building, publishing. Instead it argued for equality on the basis of its "teaching" activities. And LACCNY did not understand what "teaching" meant to academicians. The librarians equated their "teaching" with that of classroom instruction, viewing bibliographic instruction as equal to a developed theoretically-based curriculum. LACCNY held Institutes meant to be similar to academic conferences but their guest speakers were not librarians, were in fact, celebrities and popular idols; conference presentations and discussions were not officially recorded nor published in the academic literature.

And, again, why not? Surrounded by academicians and the literature of scholarship, they did not understand how the culture of academic librarianship significantly differed from the culture of academic in higher education. Across the nation, when teaching faculty wrested their power from boards and presidents, they moved from institutional loyalty to intensely competitive disciplinary groups. The professors' own social status, conferred hierarchically by rank and discipline, was guarded jealously with deliberately ambiguous peer control. The librarians did not weigh the pressure that the highly competitive academic world places for approval of its constituents based on their degrees, grants and publications. Entry alone into the discipline and acceptance by the group, almost without exception, required a doctorate and other scholarly accoutrements not in the general experience of the larger base of librarians.

According to Wilson Logan, the degree is important because it implies "research competency as well as specialized knowledge and general understanding, in contrast with technical proficiency, "[8] and Belle Zeller, the legislative champion for faculty rights in New York City, said "Let us face the fact that librarians are not considered as equals by their equals, and this is where librarians get caught up in a vicious cycle."[9] Knowingly or unknowingly, librarians were not deemed the peers of the faculty.

Which brings us to the theory of "status anxiety" which historian Robert W. Doherty established as one thread to explore in historical interpretation:

> [Since] few institutional supports for social status exist in nonaristocratic societies such as the United States, shifts in deference and authority produce anxiety in the minds of persons who belong to displaced sectors of society and also among those who have risen in position (330).[10]

During the time of this effort, were the librarians and or the teaching faculty evidencing "status anxiety"? Based on a report issued by an AAUP committee, during the depression years, it appears that the nation's economic stresses fostered campus community divisiveness between administration and faculty and among junior and senior faculty as well.[11] In the McCarthy era, Schrecker[12] showed a mirroring of the nation's fear and anxiety in academic circles as they accommodated to political repression.

We know that collective organization, historically, has been the resource of those who find themselves powerless. We now know, from Meister, et al, why LACCNY, as a voluntary association and not a union, formed to gain

power, but remained powerless, surviving nonetheless. It did not become a union because of its members general distrust of unions. It did not change its tactics because of its belief in the triumph of reason and those professional values that reveal disinterest in the mechanisms of power struggles and power alliances. Not acting on Belle Zeller's recommendation that the Association educate the academics by producing a "profile" of the librarian, they made true her prediction "we will never dispel the myths that now prevail among our colleagues."[13]

From left field, we can bring in Paolo Freire[14], expert on political consciousness, for whom groups evolve politically first from general conformity, then to naïve reform and then, finally, to refusal of anything but that which assures them the power and recognition they deserve. LACCNY was stuck in the middle stage. Each of the association's decisions--to directly petition the Board of Higher Education, to entrust its future with the Legislative Conference, to defer to their superiors, to turn down external litigious defenders, to disdain the Workers' Defense League and the United Federation of College Teachers (UFCT) --was made absent a realistic analysis of its own place in the academic environment.

The rhetoric of librarianship differs from the views of the professoriate. Amitai Etzioni explores this bind.

> [Librarians] most significant reference group is the university professor, who believes his mastery of his own field is superior...as is his knowledge of related areas. Nor does the average professor have the experience of being saved from a serious difficulty by the scientific knowledge of the librarian.[15]

LACCNY did not have the resources, know-how or sufficient support to attain its goals. It remained an intact association because it satisfied its generally apathetic membership with a sense of professional identity that promised security. Actual success or failure did not change the association's value; it was not organized for the only change it could make--self-change. It did provide a training ground in democratic due process, a peek at political workings, and a future for today's librarians still struggling with much of the same struggles. LACCNY's story is no longer a puzzle but an antiquated model from which reforming librarians must learn to enter the fray, recognize their image, get involved in changes, and wisely assimilate the larger values of academia.

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End Notes

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